

1 PETER 2:1–2:10 GROWING UP IN OUR SALVATION

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Library Bible Study

1

Principles of Christian Growth

- Salvation is an adventure, but we start out as babies.
- Christian thought is always more complex and nuanced.
- Why growth is needed: we are shallow, self-centered, simplistic and gullible.
- We aim for purity, but that is too abstract. I.e. Look to Col 1:28, Ep 4:13.
- Look at Jesus. He is always surprising us. What He does is always counter-intuitive, until it is over.

2

Principles of Christian Growth

- Born again of *imperishable seed*. 1:23. What does that mean?
- His spiritual DNA is implanted in us.
- The instruction for holy living always comes with a point.
- Mere ethical prescriptions won't work.
- You need to be completely REMADE.
- CLIP 15-24. Principles of Christian Growth.

The Message of 1 Peter

God that their access to him is priestly.¹⁵ God dwells among them. They are holy because he is holy.¹⁶ God's calling comes as a command as well as a promise. Israel is called to be what it is, *a holy nation*.¹⁷

The people of Israel broke God's covenant and defiled themselves with immorality and idolatry. God delivered his judgment through the prophets: they had become Lo-Ammi, 'no people', no longer the holy people of God.¹⁸ Yet God also promised a marvellous restoration. Israel would again be made holy. Instead of shame they would be given glory. 'And you will be called priests of the LORD, you will be named ministers of our God' (Isa. 61:6). The prophets describe the marvel of God's restoration in the latter days. Not only will the remnant of Israel be gathered to worship the Lord; the remnant of the nations, even the enemy nations, will be gathered, too. In an amazing passage, Isaiah describes the Egyptians worshipping in Assyria, and the Assyrians in Egypt, both passing by Jerusalem to do so. 'In that day Israel will be the third, along with Egypt and Assyria, a blessing on the earth. The LORD Almighty will bless them, saying, "Blessed be Egypt my people, Assyria my handiwork, and Israel my inheritance."'¹⁹ In the day of God's salvation, the covenant blessing will be shared by the enemy nations.

It is this fulfilment that Peter proclaims. The temple of the new covenant is a spiritual temple; those who are made a nation of priests are not simply the restored of Israel, but believers whom Christ gathers from the nations. If Israel through sin had become no people, and had lost the right to the covenant promise, then the grace that can restore Israelites to their forfeited inheritance can equally bring polluted Gentiles into the intimacy of fellowship with God (10).

The change of the new covenant is intensive as well as extensive. Not only are Gentiles included in God's nation of priests; their priestly access is *spiritual*, not merely ceremonial (5). Uncircumcised Gentiles were prohibited by the law from entering the temple. They were barred, of course, from the sanctuary, where only priests could minister. Neither

¹⁵ This is well argued by R. B. Y. Scott, 'A Kingdom of Priests (Exod. 19:6)', *OTS* 8 (1950), pp. 213-219; and by Elliott, *Elect*, pp. 53-59.

¹⁶ The holiness of Israel is the demand as well as the promise of God's covenant. It can never become a matter of presumption; to claim that 'the whole community is holy' in revolt against God's anointed leaders is to invite the judgment of the Lord (Num. 16:3).

¹⁷ 1 Pet. 1:15-16; Lev. 11:44-45; 19:2; 20:7.

¹⁸ 1 Pet. 2:10; Hos. 1:10; 2:23; Rom. 9:25.

¹⁹ Isa. 19:24-25; cf. 56:6-8; 66:19-21.

could they come with the people of God into the courts of the Lord. They were kept outside, on pain of death. But now Gentiles are no longer foreigners; they are

fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone . . . And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.²⁰

How can Gentiles gain this priestly privilege? The book of Leviticus cannot be amended to admit uncircumcised Gentiles into God's courts. That is what Paul's enemies accused him of doing: bringing Gentiles into the sanctuary of the Lord. They tried to tear him limb from limb (Acts 21:27ff.). They were right in thinking that the law could not be altered. Their mistake was in refusing to see that it had been fulfilled. The breadth of the gospel flows from its depth. Outward washing, the cutting away of the flesh, the offering of bulls and goats, could never remove sin or qualify any sinner to stand in the presence of the Holy One of Israel. Those elaborate preparations and safeguards bore witness to the reality of God's holiness, and to the need of cleansing and atonement. But only God could provide the true and spiritual sacrifice. Only One who had clean hands and a pure heart could ascend at last the hill of the Lord. Jesus Christ came; the one righteous, covenant-keeping Servant of the Lord. His atoning death fulfilled the temple sacrifices. His blood provided the cleansing that the old ceremonies could only picture.

Our approach to God in worship is now our coming to the living Stone of God's appointment. It is not a physical approach to an earthly edifice: it is the spiritual approach of faith in Christ. By the same token, the holiness of the believer cannot be achieved by outward washing with water; it must be the cleansing of the heart by God's Spirit. Spiritual holiness is required of the Gentiles as new members of the people of God (2 Cor. 6:16 - 7:1). Peter describes the spiritual reality of our position in order to remind us of the spiritual depth of the holiness God requires.

The church of the new covenant is not only a holy temple and priesthood enjoying the presence of God; it is also a *chosen* people, the *people* of God's own possession (9). God dwells among his people because he has

²⁰ Eph. 2:19b-20, 22.

The Message of 1 Peter

chosen them. The heart of the covenant is God's electing love. The scriptural teaching of God's choosing is sometimes questioned because it is not understood, and sometimes hated because it is understood. It can be received only by faith, for to receive it one must confess that God is God. The wonder is not that God chooses some and not others (Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau);²¹ the wonder is that God chooses any. **Certainly, God does not choose an elite.** Israel is a *chosen* people, but not a *choice* people.²² God's elect have no ground for pride. On the contrary, **God chooses not the wise, the mighty or the noble, but the foolish, the weak, the despised** (Paul says, indeed, the 'zeroes'). No-one may boast before him (1 Cor. 1:29).

If God does not choose his people for their worth or their serviceability, why does he choose them? The answer is clear:

The LORD did not set his affection on you and choose you because you were more numerous than other peoples, for you were the fewest of all peoples. But it was because the LORD loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors.²³

The Lord loves . . . because he loves! Nothing can explain the love of God for sinners. God's 'good pleasure' is the movement of his own will, springing from his own nature.²⁴ How the language of love is lavished upon God's people in the Old Testament! They are God's inheritance, his personal and prized possession, his treasure (Deut. 32:9). God bears them on his shoulders, carries them in his arms, holds them in his hand, seats them at his feet.²⁵ **He loves them with a jealous love; they are to be his alone to the exclusion of all other gods; they bear his name.**²⁶ The love of a father for a son, of a husband for a wife, is used to describe God's love for his people.²⁷

²¹ 'The whole story of the patriarchs has this motif.' Norman H. Snaith, 'Choose', in Alan Richardson (ed.), *A Theological Word Book of the Bible* (SCM Press, 1950), p. 43. See Rom. 9:10–13.

²² *Bāhūr*, the passive participle of *bāhar*, is not used of Israel, for it means 'chosen' in the sense of 'choice' – soldiers in their prime, for example. The form *bāhir* is used to describe the chosen as the elect (Ps. 106:5; Isa. 43:20–21).

²³ Deut. 7:7–8. See Deut. 10:14–17; Hos. 11:1, 4; 14:4; Jer. 31:2ff.

²⁴ The 'good pleasure' (*rāṣôn*) of God is shown in the favour of his grace (Ps. 106:4; Deut. 33:16). The 'people of good will' are the people of God's good pleasure, his elect (Luke 2:14). Cf. Ernest Vogt, 'Peace among Men of God's Good Pleasure', in Krister Stendahl (ed.), *The Scrolls and the New Testament* (Harper, 1957), pp. 114–117.

²⁵ Deut. 33:3, 12, 27; Lev. 9:5; Isa. 49:16.

²⁶ Exod. 20:5; Num. 6:22–27.

²⁷ See the treatment of God's love in the OT in Geerhardus Vos, 'The Scriptural Doctrine of the Love of God', *Presbyterian and Reformed Review* 49 (Jan. 1902), pp. 1–19.

The claim of love that God makes upon his people in the Exodus 19 passage quoted by Peter is not, however, the end of the story in the Old Testament. Israel despised God's covenant love and committed adultery with the gods of the nations (Deut. 32:6). God chose Israel, but Israel chose other gods (Judg. 5:8, NRSV). The wanton abuse of God's singular love must result in singular judgment: 'You only have I chosen of all the families of the earth; therefore I will punish you for all your sins.'²⁸ God pours out the vengeance of the covenant (Lev. 26:25).

Must all the promises of God be voided in exile and destruction? Looking at the valley of dry bones, the prophet Ezekiel might have been tempted to think so. But the vision he received gave the answer of the Lord (Ezek. 37:3–6). God's judgment on his people would be neither total nor final. Not total, for God would preserve a remnant. Not final, for God would give renewal.²⁹ Against the dark background of God's judgment, the reality of God's choosing of his people shines with new glory. The chosen of God are his elect remnant, those whom he will come to gather at last. The scattered flock, exploited by those who should be their shepherds, will be gathered by the Lord himself, the true Shepherd, and brought to the green pastures of his salvation (Ezek. 34:11ff.).

God must come to gather his own: they will hear his voice, for they know him. The Old Testament teaching of election points us forward to the election of God's own Servant. Jesus, the true Shepherd, comes to gather the scattered remnant flock and to bring in the renewal of resurrection life. 'Do not be afraid, little flock, for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom' (Luke 12:32, NRSV).

The Old Testament, therefore, presents an election within an election. Israel is chosen, but is unfaithful to its calling. Jesus comes as the elect one, the beloved Son of the Father, and he fulfils the calling of the Servant of the Lord. The elect whom Peter addresses are chosen in Christ who is foreknown before the creation of the world (1:20). As Paul tells us, 'Not all who are descended from Israel are Israel' (Rom. 9:6–8). Not the son of the flesh but the Son of the Spirit inherits the promises of God. Those who are united to Christ are those the Father has given him. The Good Shepherd holds them for ever in his hand.³⁰

²⁸ Amos 3:2; but see 9:9.

²⁹ The remnant survives (Amos 3:12; 4:11; Isa. 1:9; 17:6; Ezek. 11:13–21) and will be righteous (Jer. 3:12, 14). The renewal brings not only restoration, but glory (Mic. 7:18; Isa. 4:3; 28:5; 37:31; Ezek. 48:35; Zech. 12:8).

³⁰ John 10:27–29; 17:2, 9–10.